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ABSTRACT

Preparation of teachers for home-school-community partnerships will be most effective if it is based on a foundational approach that makes teachers aware of the social and political context of teaching and cognizant of the economic, social, and political demands that are placed on schools. A foundational approach to home-school-community connections increases student teachers' attentiveness to families' investment in their children's learning. In addition student teachers learn about those aspects of the social organization for schools that support or hinder the efforts of teachers to collaborate with families and communities. Foundation courses should be integrated with student teaching and internship experiences. When reflection on practice is achieved by integrating university classroom learning with learning in schools and communities, students can explore the relationships between families and schools, and between communities and schools, and the social context of teaching. With this preparation students will understand the challenges of connecting families with schools and be better prepared to address and sustain efforts for school-community-family partnerships. (Contains 23 references.) (JB)

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Preparing Teachers for Home-School-Community Partnerships: A Foundational Approach

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Preparing Teachers for Home-School-Community
Partnerships: A Foundational Approach

The need for a foundational perspective on home-school-community partnerships in the preparation of teachers is argued in this paper. Current recommendations for including family involvement in teacher education programs are reviewed and a case is made for integrating skill building with a foundational understanding of home-school-community partnerships. The approach proposed to infuse this foundational perspective consists of providing student teachers with the opportunity to learn first-hand about the issues affecting home-school-community partnerships and the opportunity to integrate conceptual and research-based knowledge in their reflection on that experience. The direct experience is gained through field placements as a part of foundational courses. Preparation that goes beyond the acquisition of skills in family involvement equips teachers with knowledge to weigh the relative strengths of various models of home-school-community collaboration, assess the fit between models and/or strategies according to the families and communities with which the school is working, and begin to understand what needs to happen in the school to create and sustain those partnerships.

The creation and nurturing of home-school-community partnerships demands that teachers understand the everyday reality experienced by families in their communities and grasp what needs to happen in schools to support family involvement practices. My argument for giving prospective teachers a foundational perspective about home-school-community partnerships is informed both by the enthusiastic public endorsement that this practice receives and by the knowledge that, as a rule, the uncritical implementation of family involvement projects has continued to give an advantage to those who already have social and cultural capital.

The incorporation of a family and community involvement goal in the *Educate America Act* marks the official endorsement of the role of families in children's schooling. Undoubtedly, the inclusion of this goal in the *Educate America Act* will affect teachers' work by requiring that they participate in district-wide and school-based parent involvement programs and that they intensify their efforts to establish relationships with families supportive of children's school achievement.

In this rush to teach family involvement skills to teachers, we must not forget that programs need to be tailored to the unique needs of each school, the families it serves, and their community. To enhance families' and communities' capacity to work with schools to positively affect children's learning, teachers need to be able to build knowledge about homes and communities into their reflection on family involvement practices. In the following sections I review current suggestions for the inclusion of family involvement in undergraduate teacher education and outline current thinking on a set of themes that support student teachers' reflective practice about home and community involvement.

Current Suggestions for the Inclusion of Family Involvement in Undergraduate Teacher Education

A study of undergraduate education students in two postsecondary institutions has shown that, although the majority of the students did not anticipate obstacles to working with families who were ethnically, socioeconomically, or language different from themselves, the views and values they expressed regarding family behavior were clearly middle-class (Foster & Loven, 1992). Moreover, most responses reflected a school-centered perspective of family involvement. Students were only aware of traditional ways of including parents in the school and ways in which parents could help the teacher.

Their responses are to be expected for few students recognize the impact that family struct . home responsibilities or language differences might have on family involvement. In addition, students were not aware of the ways socioeconomic status and the families' access to cultural and social capital affected their definition of the parent role. The views expressed by those students were derived from their own experience, not from coursework about family involvement.

Family involvement has received little attention in teacher education programs. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) found that only 1.94 percent of 826 competencies, skills, and objectives measured in state teacher certification exams dealt with extra-classroom influences, only one of which was parent involvement. Williams and Chavkin's (1987) survey of teacher education programs shows that only 4 percent of teaching programs have a whole course devoted to the subject; 15 percent, part of a course; and 37 percent, one class period. Although these findings do not tell us what was learned or how, they give a broad picture of the lack of attention

to family involvement in teacher education programs.

Not surprisingly, most programs that teach about family involvement, teach skills and strategies but little else. Pre-service programs rarely weave interpretive and normative perspectives with practice, depriving student teachers of an opportunity to learn how to become reflective practitioners.

Suggestions for incorporating family involvement in undergraduate teacher education are based to a large extent on research findings that indicate strong correlations between variations in teacher practices and variations in level of family and community involvement and show that teacher, family, and community involvement practices have a stronger influence on children's success in schools than family structures or ascribed statuses (Bermudez & Padron, 1987; Epstein, 1992; Moles, 1993; Williams & Chavkin, 1987).

Demands to prepare teachers to communicate and involve culturally different and disadvantaged families are a result of increasing interest in addressing demographic changes in most urban school districts and awareness of the cultural differences between school and home (Chavkin, 1993; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Moles, 1993; Ritter, Mont-Reynaud & Dornbusch, 1993). It is expected that effective approaches to involving minority parents will reduce the gap in educational achievement experienced by minority students (Chavkin, 1993).

What should student teachers learn about family involvement? Epstein (1992) contends that student teachers should become familiar with research and practice on programs that have successfully brought families closer to schools. In particular, they should learn about the connections between school and society and between school and family; student teachers should be cognizant of the effects of family structure, culture, and children's grade level on families'

involvement.

The recommendations for teacher preparation developed by Williams and Chavkin (1987) are based on the perspectives of parents, teachers, principals, and other stakeholders such as school superintendents and school board presidents. They suggest including theories about the impact of parent involvement on children's learning, the history of parent involvement, and perspectives of experts and practitioners regarding parental involvement models.

While there is agreement among researchers and practitioners about the need to teach parent involvement to student teachers, different proposals about how to incorporate parent involvement in the pre-service curriculum have been put forth. Some advocate courses devoted exclusively to the topic, others argue for infusing the theme throughout the pre-service curriculum. These proposals also differ in the extent of integration of interpretive frameworks, with both personal views and actual practice.

Researchers and practitioners interested in home-school-community partnerships agree that student teachers should acquire the skills needed to involve parents. Bermudez and Padron (1987), for example, propose that student teachers be given the opportunity to have clinical experiences with parents. These clinical experiences would serve to familiarize student teachers with minority families and to translate theories of parent involvement into practice.

Epstein and Dauber (1991) recommend that students: (1) be put in contact with successful educators who will explain the benefits accrued to them and their schools as a result of parent involvement; (2) be taught techniques to involve parents; (3) be put to work with successful models; and (4) have field experiences in tutoring, practicums, and working with parents. Pre-service courses, in their view, should fit the age/grade level of pre-service teachers. In addition,

based on the assumption that learning moves from the known to the unknown, Epstein and Dauber propose that students be introduced to more traditional forms of parent involvement first.

Williams and Chavkin (1987) have developed prototype guidelines and strategies both for pre-service and in-service teacher training in parent involvement. In their view, the ideal teacher training program includes knowledge, understanding, and skills about self, schools, parents, and the community, effective programs and methods, interpersonal communication, and limitations; and the history, theory, research, and developmental nature of parent involvement.

Differences in the type of integration of practice and theoretical knowledge favored are found among Epstein and Dauber (1991), Bermudez and Padron (1987), Foster and Loven (1992), and Williams and Chavkin (1987). While they all agree that parent involvement has both a theoretical and a practical component, Epstein and Dauber and Bermudez and Padron speak only of applying knowledge to practice. Foster and Loven suggest that students be given the opportunity to examine their personal views regarding communication with families of various social, economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds with the expectation that it will lead to considering new ways of working with families. Williams and Chavkin (1987) ask for a higher degree of integration by advocating that student teachers' beliefs about self, schools, parents, and the community be addressed when teaching them parent involvement.

In brief, these researchers have made a case for drawing from research to teach parent involvement to student teachers. They have also made a case for addressing student teachers' personal assumptions and providing them with practical and conceptual frameworks. Recommendations, such as comparing the assumptions underlying different family involvement models and providing student teachers with opportunities to examine their taken-for-granted

notions about the role of families, support the development of a foundational approach to family involvement in teacher education.

A Foundational Perspective on Home-School-Community Partnerships in Teacher Education

Foundational scholars argue that teachers' knowledge should extend beyond the classroom, that teachers should be aware of the social and political context of teaching and cognizant of the economic, social, and political demands that are placed on schools. The goal of foundations' courses is to prepare teachers to use such knowledge to inform their educational decision making.

Proponents of teacher education programs that encourage teachers to analyze their actions at technical, interpretive, and critical levels contend that this reflectivity not only allows them to interpret and evaluate past experience, but also informs their future actions (Liston & Zeichner, 1991; Ciriello, 1989).

A foundational perspective on home-school-community partnerships would have a similar goal. Student teachers would increase their attentiveness to families' investment in their children's learning, paying particular attention to the social and cultural capital available to families. In addition, they would learn about those aspects of the social organization of schools that support or hinder the work of teachers to collaborate with families and communities.

Repeatedly, students have reported "that foundational courses have exerted considerable influence on their understanding and attitudes toward educational issues," but they have also said that they remember little (Ciriello, 1989). This puzzling finding is most probably the result of course sequencing. Student teachers take foundations courses before they teach and therefore

lack the opportunity to reflect on practical experience.

The approach suggested here for providing student teachers with a foundational perspective on home-school-community partnerships recognizes the need for reflection on practice by integrating university classroom learning with learning in the community and in the schools. Students who are placed as interns in community agencies and in schools bring back to class a rich experience to be reflected upon. I will touch on three themes that can be explored using such an approach: (1) families and schools, (2) communities and schools, and (3) the social context of teaching.

Families and Schools

Teachers need to be able to think of families in ways that are productive for building partnerships. Coleman (1987) has observed that "school as we conceive of it implies family as we conceive of it and yet, he argues "family as we conceive of it no longer corresponds to family as it now exists." Coleman's research has shown the positive effect of the relations that exist in the family on children's school performance. He has found that the relations that exist in the family and in the outside community, what he calls social capital, can be invested in children's learning. Moreover, he has identified the investment strategies chosen by families under different social configurations.

Lareau (1989) formulated a conceptualization that has also taken into consideration the resources available to families, the way parents activate and invest those resources, and the social profit that families derive from these investments. Using Bourdieu's (1973) concept of cultural capital she studied the ways the relationship between families' access to books and other cultural products, their practices—such as visiting museums or seeking professional advise—, and the

academic credentials of the parents affected families' investment in their children's education.

She found that both upper and middle class and working-class parents valued educational success, but differed in the skills and resources at their disposal, the ways they activated and invested those resources, and the social profit they derived from these. Cultural capital affected the frequency and nature of the relationships that families established with schools; in particular, how closely the activities at home were tied to teacher recommendations, the extent to which they monitored children's school learning, and the way parents interacted with teachers.

Both of these researchers have shown that families have different social and cultural capital available to them in rearing their children, but that the way the families' activate their resources accounts for wide variation in student outcomes. These findings are complemented by Ogbu's(1985) research on the effect of membership in an involuntary minority on families' ideas about how to succeed in this world.

Ogbu (1985) found that these ideas are part of a shared cultural knowledge based on families' perceptions of tasks and positions available to them and ideas about how to get ahead. The community in which families live affects those ideas by the information that is accessible to them, native notions about how the world works, and perceptions about children (Okagaki & Johnson Divecha, 1993).

These insights into how parents—given their occupation, income, racial or ethnic background, and education—access resources and develop different dispositions to become involved in their children's education, is of great value to teachers who plan to capitalize on families' capacities (See Delgado-Gaitan & Ruiz, 1992 for one exemplary model of this kind).

Communities and Schools

Teachers need to be able, as well, to build partnerships with adults outside the family who are supportive of children's learning. Student teachers need to learn the ways in which community organizations and agencies support families in rearing their children. Inner city children and youth, who have few safe places to go, are eager to participate in programs "that protect them, nurture them, and respond positively to their needs and interests" (Brice-Heath & McLaughlin, 1993). For many youth the participants and staff in those programs are family. Furthermore, many of the staff in those programs work with families and serve as family advocates, accompanying parents or children to school and facilitating relationships with school staff. These organizations make social capital available to children, a finding of particular interest to those working with families that need support. Indeed, Coleman (1987) has shown that the value of social networks and supporting adults in the community is greater for children without extensive social capital at home.

If, as Coleman argues, families are not what schools conceive them to be, who else in the community can become involved in the education of children and youth? Student teachers need to spend some time in the community, outside school doors, to gain an understanding of how these organizations and agencies work with the families. This knowledge would enlighten their views of how to create and maintain home-school-community partnerships.

The Social Context of Teaching

Teacher education does not prepare student teachers to think about the school as an organization and the ways this organization influences their work as teachers. Pre-service course work focuses on what goes on in the classroom which leads student teachers to think of teaching

as a task accomplished in isolation.

A notion of profession based on teacher attributes, such as monopoly of expert knowledge, leads Thompson (1993) to contend that two currents in national efforts to restructure education seem to be on a collision course, teacher professionalization and family involvement. Many others agree with him that these two trends pull teachers in opposite directions. Talbert and McLaughlin (1994), however, have shown that various organization settings influence and delimit the character and strength of the teachers' professional community. These settings include school sectors, districts, schools, subject-matter departments and, in many cases, teacher networks. Their study of professional communities shows that collegial work groups and networks support a service ethic to the students, and, it is safe to infer, that active building of partnerships to support students' learning is to be expected.

Student teachers who learn about these findings will become better prepared to develop new ways of involving families. If building home-school-partnerships is not to be a shallow approach, student teachers need to learn how to work with their colleagues. Shadowing teachers who are successful at sharing a dialog with colleagues provides the opportunity to learn about collegial relations.

Recommendations for teaching parent involvement in a teacher preparation program are often based on widely accepted models of school change. In those models, a knowledge base of teaching, detached from the social conditions that produced it, is identified, codified, and disseminated. Change is measured by diminished resistance to the new practices, improvement in attitude toward the program, and display of new skills, attributes, and effects (Popkewitz, 1991). For instance, one recommendation about how to teach family involvement to student teachers

suggests proceeding from the known to the unknown so as to decrease resistance to the new practice (Williams & Chavkin, 1987; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Others attempt to change teachers' perceptions about families and redefining the teachers' role to include working with parents, but they do not consider the social context of families' and teachers' roles and perceptions.

If we proceed along the path of least resistance, most of the family involvement projects that will be implemented will reinforce traditional forms of family involvement preferred by middle-class families, and the practice will continue to disenfranchise disadvantaged families. If on the other hand, decisions about which family involvement projects are to be implemented are based on an understanding of family, and the broader context of home and school, programs that support disenfranchised families in their educational role can be implemented.

Conclusion

A foundational perspective can inform student teachers about the social space in which home, school, and community can form partnerships; student teachers will begin to identify some of the teacher practices and the changes required in the school that support those partnerships. As they learn more about families, student teachers will be more aware of what is being asked of families and the support families and schools can receive from the community. Student teachers will come to realize that "the task of connecting families and schools is both formidable and attainable" (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). They will be better prepared to embark and sustain their effort, an investment well worth its rewards in terms of support for teachers' work and teachers' sense of efficacy, and most of all for its wide range of positive effects on students' learning.

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